New radio network boosts operating Efficiency, proves of help to riders

AC Transit's operation was beamed to new efficiency this month—and new drama—as the two-way radio network crackled through its first trials and proved its versatility.

For drivers it was "beautiful," "terrific," a "real help."

At Central Dispatch headquarters, it was transportation with every facility, 300 buses at the other end of a microphone, ready to be moved in accordance with any need or situation.

The advantage of instant communication in improved operations was obvious—and outstanding. The added value to the District's customers surpassed expectations.

The two-way radio link was the means of quickly and smoothly handling 3,000 extra riders who turned out on a Saturday morning to ride to a Vietnam demonstration in San Francisco.

It was the means of extending a transbay line to 73rd Ave. and East 14th St. on a Sunday afternoon during the California Spring Garden Show, so passengers could make a direct transfer to the coliseum Line 57C.

With the basic fleet of buses now equipped with handsets, communications have been "improved 100 percent," according to Central Dispatcher Robert Brower.

"An accident or a fire can stop street transportation. Now, with a radio call, we can detour around any obstruction. In mechanical difficulties, it's terrific. We can send help immediately. We can cut buses in on lines that are overloaded with passengers or call them back if they aren't needed."

Security has been improved. The number of hold-ups has declined. Operators were making use of handsets to report suspicious riders—as well as to warn of rowdism.

In one instance a vandal was arrested after a passenger told the driver the youth was slashing a seat. The operator

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District veterans appointed to new Positions in AC Transit departments

E. Sam Davis returned to AC Transit this month as director of research and planning, terminating a leave of absence taken two years ago to head the Northern California Transit Demonstration Project.

Davis, whose experience in transportation operations dates back to 1914, will represent the district on a staff level in implementing project recommendations, designed to achieve coordination of the future rapid transit network with existing bus facilities.

Other Appointments

With the return of "E. Sam," Warren E. Robinson, acting director of research and planning during Davis' absence, was elevated to the position of transportation engineer.

Robinson went to work for the Key System as a mail boy in 1936, but two months later, moved into the scheduling department—his home since.

During the years, "Robbie" progressed to supervisor, then superintendent of scheduling; a post he held when Davis left in April, 1965, to head the coordination study.

Robinson serves as the District's representative on the San Leandro Chamber of Commerce and is treasurer of Castro Valley Toastmasters. He lives at 17849 Carmel Dr., Castro Valley.

Another neighbor, R. P. Videll, 15125 Wiley St., San Leandro, was appointed superintendent of schedules, taking Robinson's former position.

Videll went to work for the former East Bay Street Railway in 1936 as a file clerk and, like Robinson, traveled the scheduling route through street cars, trains and buses. He has been serving as supervisor of schedules.

In another departmental change, Arthur De Spiganovicz was appointed acting personnel manager, replacing Frank W. Curcio, who resigned.

Spiganovicz, of 7070 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, went to work for Key System April 1, 1937, as a junior clerk-messenger. He became an accountant, supervisor of payroll and timekeeping during World War II, then superintendent of methods and statistics. From 1947 until the District took over in 1960, he served as assistant controller.

New Personnel Offices

A public accountant, "Spig" was elevated from cashier to his new post, moving at the same time into offices on the fourth floor of Latham Square Bldg.

Curcio, of 2701 Las Aromas, Oakland, resigned to become manager of the Merchants Exchange Club in San Francisco.

He joined the District on Nov. 1, 1960, and handled basic records for all employees — including the complex paper work involved with new employee benefits.

This bus is 'boss'

Blind students learn 'feel' of riding

A bus went back to school this month—and became the most patted coach in the fleet.

The bus, with instructor Harvey Asp, was used to give four blind students at Bancroft Junior High School in San Leandro their first practice in using public transportation. It then was moved to Canyon High School in Castro Valley, where a like number of youngsters had their instruction in how to ride a bus—and know one "in the dark."

Blind students in both Alameda and Contra Costa County—a few at a time—are getting the "feel" and knowledge of bus riding in an orientation mobility program designed to put them firmly on their own two feet—and just as firmly in the seats of public carriers.

Officially, a federal grant from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare finances the program. Under it, blind teen-agers are learning how to get around by themselves—to stores and schools, while still in their own neighborhoods.

Some now are graduating to bus riding, armed with white canes, eagerness, fun and confidence. Their reaction to their first experience:

"A bus is really boss."

The pilot group included Yolanda Vega, 16, 1842 Fruitvale Ave., and Maggie Gisslow, of 16, 6922 Arthur St., both of Oakland, and Kay Rogers, 15, 2462 Fiji Way, and Rick Lovecchio, 16, 1023 Victoria Ave., both San Leandro.

Their first instruction was to feel the bus all the way around. And never has a coach had such a patting!

The youngsters investigated the outside—including the engine—then went through the inside. They located hand rails, the fare box, practiced how to get change, pay a fare, request a transfer. They learned how to get off, how to ask the help of the operator. Then they took practice runs to acquire experience and a "sense" of traveling.

Waiting for them, at the end of their course, was the inevitable examination paper—in Braille.

Before they pass this course, they'll know the cost of bus transportation, the seating capacity of a coach, location of driver, safety practices, transfer procedures—and "how a bus feels."

HOW TO RIDE A BUS—Blind teen-agers get first practice in an AC Transit bus, loaned for Alameda County School Department mobility program. Kay Rogers, left, seated, has passenger status, as Rick Lovecchio accepts transfer from Instructor Harvey Asp. Helping Rick is mobility instructor Tom Trevena. At right, youngsters get "feel" of coach engine with help of Robert McMullen, San Leandro resource teacher for blind.
Revenue up for nine month period

Record revenue was collected by AC Transit during the first nine months of the district’s current operating year, reaching $10,945,966—an increase of 5.6 percent over the same period a year ago.

John F. Larson, treasurer-controller, predicted the income would be sufficient to balance the year’s budget on June 30.

Expenses for operating the district’s fleet of 683 buses also were up, to a high of $8,426,900, a gain of 7.4 percent. An increase in labor costs of 8.4 percent, to $8,426,900, was the principal reason for the gain in expenses, Larson said.

The transit official attributed added income primarily to greater use of charter buses and a rate increase in transbay commute fares and East Bay children’s fares, effective last year.

Over the past five years, operating income for the same nine-month period has increased 14.7 percent.

Despite rainy weather and the “tight money” economy, transbay buses are carrying more passengers than ever—with midday shoppers adding to the count.

Transbay riding jumped to 10,920,766 riders, an increase of 5.82 percent over the same period a year ago. East Bay riding, however, dropped off during the nine months, to 28,176,446 passengers, a decrease of 2.06 percent.

In the total number of riders carried, the District managed to just about hold its own. The tally reached 38,467,212, down 0.07 percent.

Transfers are For sharing

Thoughtfulness of bus operator Victor Jacobson in trying to find an old train transfer for the collection of a young passenger brought a surprising deluge this month.

Readers of Transit Times, it seems, include others who collect—and share.

The February issue reported on the efforts of Jacobson to find a line transfer from the Key System trains to add to the Treasure Island transfer he had given to Debbie Kahane, 14, of 1039 Rose Ave., Oakland.

Debbie, who started collecting transfers two years ago after riding with AC Transit to school, received more than a “token” response.

Transfers from every street car line operating in the East Bay in the 1920’s were sent to the girl by Vernon Sappers, East Bay railroad and transit historian. John G. Niolsen of Oakland, transfer and token collector, offered to share his collection, including transfers from other cities. Others sent along samples, boosting Debbie’s hobby to some 1,500 different transfers.

One response came from Jack Eisen, reporter on the Washington Post, direct from the U.S. Senate press gallery.

His letter made class headlines at Debbie’s school, Piedmont High. He included a batch of San Francisco and Oakland street car transfers—and his own boyhood recollections of riding local lines.

It was a “historic” report for the history class. As Debbie said: “It isn’t every day you hear from the Senate press gallery!”

Indignation prompts me to write this letter .... I boarded this bus just as it was about to leave and was followed by a child of school age .... It was only after the bus had started up and was in the intersection that the child started screaming for her mother. The driver looked across the street where passengers had just disembarked from a 72 bus and saw the child’s mother. He motioned for her to cross to the bus stop ... where he waited .... I saw her deliberately wait for two light changes before she slowly crossed to board the bus. Instead of thanking the driver for this courtesy, she was extremely belligerent and abusive .... I think it .... time someone came to the defense of our drivers who are continually subjected to harassment and this kind of treatment .... F. Green

East Bay railroad and transit historian.

I want to congratulate you upon the excellence of your driver (Melchor Ocampo) who showed me such kind consideration and courtesy in the heavy rain ... all of your drivers are efficient and courteous, but he was exceptionally so .... Mrs. Virginia Arnold

Oakland

It gives me so much pleasure to write letters of praise for deserving operators ... this is especially for #1698 (J. H. Kidd) ... he really represents very highly your Negro operators. Their personal appearance in neatness is 100 percent. They are efficient and courteous—always smiling. Such qualities are a must for all those who serve on public transportation.

Annette Jordan
San Leandro

... could not the benches at the NE corner of 20th and Franklin be moved closer to the bus stop? Today, before I could get from the bench (I am handicapped somewhat in walking) to the bus stop, the #76 which I wanted slowed down but didn’t stop. Had the benches been opposite the bus stop sign, the driver would have noticed me and stopped ... (The company owning the benches have moved them to a more convenient position.—Ed.) L. E. Anderson

Oakland

... you invite comment on your Freeway Train. I realize ... you wanted comments from riders, however may I say how impressed I was by such an imaginative solution to the problem of modern mass transportation ...

Graeme A. Hood
Victoria, Australia
Retirement ahead for workers

After years of making up pay checks for salaried personnel and pensioners, Mrs. Alice Haywood, senior clerk in the accounting department, will have her chance at "receiving" July 1, when she retires from 32 years of service.

The District's main contact with the "old timers," Mrs. Haywood sends out $25,000 in checks each month to some 262 pensioners—many of them long-time friends and one-time fellow workers.

Her service began July 1, 1935, as a stenographer-clerk in timekeeping. She worked under a series of company names and bosses, culminating her career with J. F. Larson, treasurer-controller for AC Transit.

With her husband, Howard, she plans to enjoy patio living at their home, 710 East 23rd St., Oakland, along with two dogs and assorted wild birds. Cooking, sewing and travel also are on the agenda.

James G. Ritchie, 67, of 1639 Curtis St., Berkeley, retiring June 1, can tell you exactly what he's done with his time—at least since the District took over in 1960.

Working alone, he's painted the outside of 157 AC Transit buses, giving them the new color scheme (he's changed colors three times since he went to work in 1945).

Ritchie and his wife plan to retire to Santa Cruz.

Others pensioned June 1 include Fred G. Barnes, 62, who "would be working yet if they hadn't taken off the trains."

He's turned in his brass, but not his rolling stock.

Barnes has a model railroad, but instead of confining it to a workshop, runs it through all of his home at 2732 78th Ave., Oakland. He spent 14 years at the controls of Key System trains before turning to bus driving in 1958, working out of Seminary Division.

Another "whistle and gong" man, John M. DeCoite, 65, 1738 Nelson St., San Leandro, also moved from trains to buses in 1958, but hasn't done much changing since. He's been driving since that year on Line 88 in West Oakland and feels he's left behind a lot of friends. His service dates back to Aug. 13, 1941.

Richard L. Edwards, 65, 520 Everett St., El Cerrito, closing the books on 28 years of work, started on the street cars in January, 1939, then took over the wheel six months later. He worked last on Line 12 out of Emeryville Division. His plans include a trip to San Salvador, Central America, in September.

Luther L. Wilson, 62, 1114 Evelyn Ave., Albany, spent his past four years on the Treasure Island line—"the best run we have." He worked briefly in the shops before he became a bus driver in 1945, plans now to "take it easy—watching weeds grow."

M. E. Willis, 65, of 653 Clara St., Oakland, has given up driving for AC Transit, but plans to "keep on preaching." He's been pastor of the San Leandro Bible Church for the past seven years. A long-time driver on Line 14 (Brookdale Ave.-Emeryville), Willis went to work on the street cars in 1927, became a bus driver in 1932.

Passenger revenue and number of riders took a drop during March, with only transbay lines continuing to show a steady gain.

Revenue for the month totaled $1,217,822, down $16,154 or 1.31 percent below year-ago revenue. On East Bay lines, the decrease reached 5.30 percent, while on transbay lines, revenue showed a gain of 4.49 percent.

Number of riders carried totaled 4,541,468, a decrease of 4.08 percent. Riding was down 6.64 percent on East Bay lines, but showed a gain of 3.38 percent on transbay.

Transbay commute sales were up, with a total of $202,805, compared to sales of $199,790 during the same month a year ago.

Operation costs were $1,322,181, a boost of $28,305 or 2.19 percent.

Weekend service between San Francisco, San Leandro and Hayward was boosted by the District this month to accommodate additional riders. Two buses were added Saturday afternoon, traveling non-stop via Nimitz Freeway to High St. The earlier schedule terminates at Estudillo Ave. in San Leandro, while the later bus continues to Hayward.

A new schedule was added to Line K (Bancroft Ave.) and another express bus was put into service on Line R (East 14th St.) Sunday afternoons.

Buses on MacArthur Blvd. Line 57C also looped into the coliseum complex for visitors to garden show.
At an adjourned regular meeting April 26, the Board of Directors:

- Authorized personnel and salary adjustments in scheduling, and research and planning departments, and return of E. Sam Davis to full-time employment as Director of Research and Planning, on motion of Director Coburn. (See story, Pg. 2.)

- Supported passage of several measures before State Legislature affecting transit industry, and approved modification of agreement with Bay Area Rapid Transit District regarding BARTD purchase of a portion of Richmond Division property, on motion of Director Rinehart.

Radio 'voice' gives buses new mobility

(Continued from page 1)
quietly radioed Central Dispatch and the word was passed in turn to Richmond police. The youth shortly was removed by a patrol car.

For driver L. F. Manning, the radio network "paid for itself" when an elderly woman had a heart seizure on his Foothill Blvd. coach. He radioed in to ask CD to call the fire department and an ambulance. Their prompt response was credited for her revival.

Operator George "Ted" Maltby made the news — and TV channels — when he reported a broken gas main in the Piedmont Pines area of Oakland. Maltby smelled the odor of gas and noticed the street had dropped slightly at Chelton and Chelsea Drs. As a result of his radio warning, CD called PG&E; barricades were erected and buses detoured. The call apparently was the first alert for what developed into a mammoth slide.

Driver W. L. Prather used his radio to ask dispatching headquarters to notify the fire department when he saw flames in a Berkeley building. Then he grabbed his own fire extinguisher and put out the flames before help arrived.

Drivers agreed the radio added to their feeling of security and was of outstanding help in efficiency. They were especially pleased — in Manning's words— "because we can do a better job for our customers than ever before."