Special bus lane speeds commuters

While passenger cars inch along bumper to bumper on a traffic-choked freeway, commuter buses are moving freely on their own expressway in an experiment near Washington, D.C.

Success of the exclusive bus lane has given momentum to consideration of similar programs in other metropolitan areas—including the East Bay.

On Interstate Highway 95 in suburban Virginia, coaches are bypassing a highly congested section at 60 miles an hour while on exclusive bus expressway.

The Virginia Department of Highways, in an unprecedented action, authorized exclusive bus use of two lanes northbound between 6:30 and 9 a.m. At other times the lanes are open to southbound traffic.

The exclusive roadway is being used by about 45 buses, 39 of them carrying commuters into Washington. The others are long distance coaches. Commuter riding increased 14.81 percent during first three weeks of the experiment.

Federal Highway Administrator Francis C. Turner feels the special bus lane is the way to solve "most urban transportation problems." He has directed regional offices to be alert to ways to apply bus bypass plans.

State encouragement

California's State Department of Public Works is authorized to set aside preferential freeway lanes for public mass transportation under State legislation effective this month. The bill calling for experiments in better freeway occupancy was authorized by Sen. Tom Carrell, D.-San Fernando.

AC Transit, which had an exclusive bus lane on the Bay Bridge during reconstruction in 1962, is among properties keenly interested in developing special lanes. At that time, buses crossed the span in 13 minutes, traveling twice as fast as automobiles.

Alan L. Bingham, general manager, reported District commute business has jumped 70 percent since AC Transit commenced operations nine years ago—and could expect to "really skyrocket" if buses could bypass snarled traffic.

"Motorists, watching buses whiz by while entangled in congestion, can be expected to try the bus," he said. "Each bus takes the place of 35 automobiles."

Bingham said 425 buses carry 15,273 passengers across the span between 4 and 6 p.m., according to a study by University of California's Institute of Transportation and Traffic Engineering. In the same period, 14,509 cars are transporting 22,941 passengers.

The report showed AC Transit and Greyhound buses carry 55 percent of travelers on the bridge during the commute peak between 5 and 5:30 p.m.
AC Transit on the move

Here comes Gerald down the road

By ELINOR HAYES
Tribune Staff Writer

Imagine the surprise of a Sacramento Valley farmer looking up from plowing to see an AC Transit bus coming down his little country road! Imagine the consternation of 100,000 wild ducks when down a levee on the Gray Lodge Wildlife area, out of Gridley, comes the AC Transit bus!

But it happened the week end of Oct. 25-26 when driver Gerald Thorngren piloted a charter bus for 40 enrollees in the University of California Extension course, "Across California."

The party spent the night at the Sierra Club lodge at Donner Summit. Thorngren was applauded and praised by members of the party for his skill in driving the big vehicle down country one-lane back roads so the passengers could study trees and birds in their native habitat.

As a result, the party got a look at autumn coloring and wildlife missed by those who always stay on the main highway.

For Thorngren, with the District for nine years, it was his first charter trip. He lives with his wife, Jewell, at 6103 Plymouth St., Richmond, and is on the extra board.

"I listened as I drove and learned as much as any of my classmates," he said.

He also was observed helping with the dishes at the Sierra lodge.

"Santa's Toylan" to carry holiday message

District workers were busy this month decorating a bus, with the theme of "Santa's Toylan," to carry holiday greetings to East Bay residents for the seventh year in a row.

It will be the 30th year that Nicholas P. Alevizos, superintendent of Richmond Division, changes suits to become a "flying Santa Claus," riding on top of the bus as it makes its initial appearance in cities from Richmond to Hayward. He'll be in his own sleigh, pulled by tiny reindeer, broadcasting greetings to youngsters at bus stops.

The bus will make its debut on Friday, Nov. 28, with airborne St. Nick and a full pack of candy canes. The rest of the season, it will be assigned to regular service on different lines, without Santa.

Two women operators, Adele Bosco and Priscilla "Pat" Grap, again will dress in "Santa's Helper" costumes to distribute candy canes to bus riding passengers during the holidays. A party for commuters, featuring young accordion players, the Glo-tones, will be held at the Transbay Transit Terminal before Christmas.

The "Santa's Toylan" bus will be bright red, gold, green and white and will be decorated with cutouts of stuffed animals, drums and bugles. The interior will have garlands of holly.

Senior citizens to ride for 10 cents

Senior citizens will be able to ride District buses in the East Bay for 10 cents during off-peak hours, starting Jan. 1, 1970.

The reduction in fare will be for a one year period on an experimental basis, according to action taken this month by the Board of Directors.

Details as to method of identification and exact hours are to be worked out before the trial period.

A majority of the seven-man board voted for lower fares after speakers appeared at a special meeting to make pleas for the 10 cent fare to allow persons on limited income mobility for shopping, recreation and community participation.

Speakers generally pointed out social security benefits have not kept up with the cost of living and payment of present adult fares of 25 cents for a one-way bus ride took "too big a chunk" out of reduced income.

Board action came after Alan L. Bingham, general manager, agreed there was a need for lower fares, but experience on other properties showed revenue losses as result of special oldster rates.

"We're trying to watch your dollars," he said. "We don't know what the loss in income to AC Transit will be."
Study on fast airport transit underway

A study expected to help pave the way for development of a regional airport transit service that would be superior to any in the nation has been set in motion by six area agencies.

The study has as its primary purpose determination of a system to link the airport to BART, the Coliseum and adjacent industrial and motel-hotel facilities. Also involved are funding, method of operating the system and interim program and additional transit needs.

Completion of Phase I will give participating agencies an opportunity to decide on proceeding with detailed engineering work under Phase II, estimated to cost $210,000.

Alan L. Bingham, general manager of AC Transit, who proposed the study over a year ago, said highly efficient methods of handling baggage also should be devised, so air passengers can board a plane and travel to the Bay area with only one local change—from plane to regional transit. Luggage should be waiting when the passenger arrives at the downtown BART station, he added.

Serving as engineering consultants are Kaiser Engineers of Oakland. The firm is working in association with Peak, Marwick, Mitchell & Company and Oka-moto/Liskamm, both of San Francisco.

Other service

The feasibility study also is considering additional service to the airport from areas that will not be served directly by the BART system.

The Oakland Airport Access Task Force was formed by AC Transit, BART, Coliseum, Inc., City of Oakland, County of Alameda and Port of Oakland to develop a network that would efficiently serve the East Bay area and put the Oakland terminal at the doorstep of San Francisco.

One of the task force's first acts was to file application with the U.S. Department of Transportation for $80,000 to finance two-thirds of the first phase of an engineering study. The agencies jointly are contributing $30,000 toward the initial study.

First phase includes determination of a system to link the airport to BART, the Coliseum and adjacent industrial and motel-hotel facilities. Also involved are funding, method of operating the system and interim program and additional transit needs.

Transit business was brisk during September, with fare box revenue and the number of passengers carried showing an increase.

Business experience shows healthy gains

Transit business was brisk during September, with fare box revenue and the number of passengers carried showing an increase.

Passenger revenue for the month totaled $1,301,085, an increase of $129,942 or 11.10 percent over the September, 1968 total of $1,171,143. Revenue on East Bay lines was $730,059, up 9.01 percent compared to revenue of $670,549 collected in the same month a year ago. Transbay income totaled $570,126, up 13.89 percent over the previous September revenue of $500,594.

Commuter book sales for September were $251,390, an increase of 21.5 over year ago sales of $206,826.

The number of passengers carried during the month totaled 4,358,467, up 2.40 percent over the total of 4,256,223 who rode in September, 1968. East Bay riding showed an increase of 2.22 percent, while transbay riding was up 2.88 percent.

Operation costs during the month totaled $1,560,620, an increase of $91,146 or 6.20 percent over year ago expenses of $1,469,474. The District operated 2,011,357 miles of service, an increase of 74,207 miles or 3.83 percent above mileage of 1,937,150, operated in the same month in 1968.

Total revenue of $1,815,987 was sufficient to cover operational costs, depreciation and bond debt requirements.

The transit industry nationally indicated a riding decrease for the month of 0.25 percent.
Actions of the Board

At an adjourned regular meeting Oct. 17, the Board of Directors:

- Approved agreement for annexation of Sherwood Forest area of EL Sobrante, Contra Costa County, on motion of Director Rinehart.
- Called a special election Nov. 18 on annexation of Sherwood Forest, on motion of Director Coburn.
- Appointed General Manager to Board of Control, Oakland Airport Access Task Force, and Assistant General Manager for Administration as alternate, on motion of Director Copeland. (See story, Pg. 2)

At an adjourned regular meeting Oct. 29, the Board of Directors:

- Referred bids for furnishing petroleum products to General Manager for evaluation and report, on motion of Director Coburn.
- Rejected bids for furnishing bus washers and cleaner, on motion of Director Bettencourt.
- Approved minor reroutings of Line 68 and Line 88 and Line 83 extension, on motion of Director Bettencourt.
- Granted construction easement to BART through Richmond Division for sum of $1,750, on motion of Director Bettencourt.
- Authorized four staff members to study coordination between bus and rapid transit operations in other cities, on motion of Director Bettencourt.

At an adjourned regular meeting Nov. 12, the Board of Directors:

- Granted request of senior citizens for 10-cent fare during off peak hours for a one year trial period, on motion of Director Rinehart. (See story, Pg. 5)

At a regular meeting Nov. 12, the Board of Directors:

- Referred bids for furnishing and installing radio equipment to staff for study, on motion of Director Coburn.
- Awarded contract for furnishing petroleum products to Texaco Co., on motion of Director Coburn.
- Approved minutes of Finance Committee, on motion of Director Rinehart.

AC Transit
Latham Square Building
Oakland, California 94612