Double-duty vans answer regular Road-calls, give easier access
Fajans heads '88 District Board; Director Peter Smith resigns

Michael H. Fajans, who joined the Board of Directors to represent Ward I in 1979, was elected President during the annual end-of-year election of officers. Chosen to serve as 1988 Vice-President was Peter Smith, who, however, subsequently announced his resignation from the Ward III seat (see box).

The election took place at the December 22 meeting of AC Transit's seven member policy-making body.

Fajans was appointed to the Ward I seat in early 1979 to fill a vacancy, then claimed the position through election by his Berkeley-Oakland constituency in 1980. His prior year as the Board's top officer was in 1983. In addition, he served two terms as Vice-President, in 1982 and 1986.

An urban planner who lives in Berkeley, where he earned a master's degree in City Planning at the University of California, Fajans has compiled an extensive career record in projects such as downtown Oakland urban renewal, a BART land use and urban development impact project, and other housing/use/transportation studies involving a number of American and European cities.

His constituency includes most of Berkeley and a large portion of Oakland — an area where he has maintained an active involvement in community issues for some two decades. He is a member of the American Planning Association and has been an enthusiastic supporter of local, regional, and national transit projects.

In assuming his new position of Board leadership, Fajans succeeds last year's President, Roy Nakadegawa.

The election took place at the December 22 meeting of AC Transit's policy-making body; Director Smith's resignation was announced officially January 29.

Career/Board position Conflict cited by Smith

Peter Smith

After a year of representing Ward III, Director Peter Smith announced his resignation in January, stating: "I must make the choice between two forms of public service on which I place high value."

Smith represented voters of Alameda, Piedmont and much of Oakland. A graduate of Harvard and the University of San Francisco School of Law, he joined the staff of the Alameda County District Attorney — the official who recently advised that Smith's position as a District Director and a public prosecutor were incompatible.

"Due to circumstances beyond my control, I am forced to make a choice between my position here and my position as a deputy district attorney," Smith said in a letter to District employees. "It was a very difficult choice . . . ."

Smith was elected in November, 1986, to succeed long-time Director John McDonnell, who retired.

As provided for by law, interested citizens who reside and vote within Ward III were invited to fill the vacancy; and the Board plans on announcing an appointee in March.

New Interim GM begins forging Long-range Management Plan

As AC Transit's Interim General Manager for the next six months, Neil Peterson will be directing the operations of the District.

An experienced transit administrator, Peterson has built a business providing interim management services to a variety of client organizations, including private firms, municipalities, and other transportation agencies. His firm, ExecuTemps, is headquartered in Seattle, Washington.

In introducing Peterson to staff (and to news media), Board President Michael H. Fajans noted that the Directors deemed the bus system "very fortunate to have found an interim executive with his background and experience."

Peterson is no newcomer to mass transportation, having served as executive director of Seattle's METRO system from 1977 to 1983. METRO operates a fleet of 1,100 buses serving over 2,000 square miles of Seattle and surrounding environs, as well as providing waste management services.

INTERIM CHIEF — On his first day at the District, January 4, Neil Peterson (center) — flanked by Board officers Peter Smith (left) and Michael Fajans — answered press questions. Oakland Tribune Reporter Mike Collier is at far left.

Neil Peterson

On arrival at AC Transit, the new top executive observed: "Basically, transit is a people-intensive business; and the key to restoring AC Transit's national renown rests entirely on leveraging the power of the 2,100 people who are here — particularly maintenance personnel and bus operators, who are our ambassadors every day in providing service."

Peterson's six-month contract for providing management services was necessitated by the departure of Gene P. Gardiner, who had announced his retirement effective January 1, 1988. During the next few months, another consultant team — Booz-Allen & Hamilton — also will be on board to evaluate current management personnel, policies and procedures.

As Directors prepare to initiate a search for a permanent GM later this year, both consultants are expected to provide expert assistance in forming a new long-term Management Action Plan.

Meantime, Peterson — a resident of Seattle, where his consulting firm has its home-base — began his tenure at the District's Oakland headquarters on January 4.
Operational strategy: add part-timers

Interim General Manager Neil Peterson reported to District Directors February 10 that, without changing the total number of hours buses operate in revenue service, the District still can realize total projected savings worth an estimated $2.3 million annually.

"The major key is to optimize the use of fully-trained part-time bus drivers in the work-force," Peterson stated. "Part-timers are a major potential resource which hasn't been fully utilized at AC Transit. This year, we're going to capitalize on that valuable asset."

Peterson aims to structure bus service so that part-timers — newer drivers just beginning transit careers — are dispatched on less lengthy assignments, particularly during commute hours, when the entire active fleet is in service.

In recent weeks, 32 part-timers went through the training and are being phased into service. Ten more are now learning to drive buses and serve bus riders at the System's Training and Education Center in Hayward; and by March, 100 more part-timers will be hired.

To help achieve a smooth adjustment in the ratio of full-time to part-time bus drivers, AC Transit will be offering an Early Retirement program for District veterans in all positions — including bus operators. Although details are still being worked out, Peterson says this incentive program could yield additional dollar benefits by further reducing total payroll.

These economy moves are scheduled to begin with AC Transit's March 6 Driver Sign-Up, in which operators select their individual segments of daily work.

30 more bend-in-the-middle coaches proposed

The Board of Directors has approved a recommendation from Interim General Manager Neil Peterson to purchase 30 additional articulated coaches. These will be dispatched on major East Bay and transbay trunk lines — maintaining or increasing seating capacity, particularly during commute hours.

Currently, there are only 30 articulated units in AC Transit's 800-bus fleet. Peterson proposed to redirect an existing capital bus replacement grant to purchase the more costly, but more cost-effective, 60-foot coaches.

The bend-in-the-middle buses seat nearly 70 riders, compared to 50 or fewer in standard size coaches — thus greatly increasing the efficiency with which a single bus driver's skills can be utilized on heavily-traveled routes. Since 85 percent of the costs of operating a bus each hour are in wages and benefits, articulated buses increase the number of riders carried for the same labor cost.

With the concurrence of UMTA, which will be financing a large percentage of the cost, bids for the manufacture of the articulated coaches could be sought in the next few weeks. It's anticipated that a contract could be awarded by June, with delivery of the high-capacity buses scheduled for 1989.

Meantime, Peterson says, he's exploring possible arrangements to lease articulated coaches for use on major trunk lines where the extra capacity can maintain or increase the number of commute-hour seats without hiking operating costs.

Transit trends and topics

Modified vans meet two-fold need

Little solutions can make big differences, AC Transit has found in using small vans for transporting disabled passengers who have had difficulty with traditional ease-of-access buses.

In a move to demonstrate a firm commitment to getting elderly and handicapped riders where they need to go, AC Transit purchased five Ford three-quarter-ton modified vans with rear door lifts. They serve a two-fold function: for use by road supervisors and to aid those disabled riders whose needs are not met by regular accessible buses.

Some modification of the vehicles was done at the factory, such as raising the ceiling for improved headroom. AC Transit has added special equipment, including radio communications gear, emergency items such as flares and first aid boxes, and other spare equipment essential to road supervisors' work in dealing with critical situations on the street.

Before the vans were assigned across AC Transit's 750-square-mile service area, road supervisors participated in special training sessions covering both mechanical operation of the $25,500 vans and understanding of the needs and concerns of the disabled.

"We felt vans were an answer to the problem of reliability," says James Lee, the District's accessibility coordinator who is himself a wheelchair user. "Vans are proving to be an integral part of the solution to accessibility as we work, through upgraded engineering and technology, on reliability of regular bus lifts."

AC Transit records show that, on average, passenger lifts are activated on regular buses about 90 times daily, while the vans are used an average of five times a month for accessibility, while also being regularly utilized by supervisors carrying out their day-to-day responsibilities.

THE COVER — AC Transit Supervisor Willie Prather (left) demonstrates lift on small van used to meet two on-street needs: answering standard road-calls and providing back-up access for the disabled in cases where regular coach equipment fails or simply does not meet the special needs of a patron. Hale Zukas, long-time advocate for the disabled, helps test the van lift.

BOARD CEREMONY — 1987 Board President Roy Nakadegawa (right) receives now-traditional gavel from his successor, Michael H. Fajans.
Comprehensive Service Plan: AC Transit District’s route revamp is key regional concern

The Comprehensive Service Plan (CSP) — tantamount to a total overhaul of bus routes and schedules serving the entire metropolitan East Bay — is aimed at producing a service network tailored to meet needs of current riders while attracting significant numbers of new patrons to the system.

Mass transit, in the form of a horse-drawn rail car, was introduced to the streets of Oakland in 1869. Since then, sporadic adjustments and extensions were made in response to localized demands. Now, for the first time, the entire East Bay bus route network — and its relationship with BART rail — is being analyzed as a single unit.

With most of the preparatory work done, AC Transit planners are beginning to involve many others in analyzing a “model” bus route network that’s tangible evidence of the kinds of improvements the CSP could yield.

The system-wide CSP model was drafted (with assistance from UC Berkeley’s Institute for Transportation Studies) to facilitate re-examination of the whole service network in the context of the entire East Bay, including current and projected shifts in employment, educational, medical, residential, and recreational patterns.

Currently, internal communications are encouraging drivers, mechanics, and support personnel — the District’s front-line transit experts — to help in the planning process. Staff also will be reaching out to public officials, business, civic/neighborhood groups, and interested citizens — in order to get opinions and reactions from across the entire East Bay.

Although it’s relatively easy to get around most of the metropolitan East Bay using AC Transit buses, new concepts proposed in the CSP could provide easier, more direct access to a greater number of destinations. These concepts include a “grid network” of interconnecting routes in high-density areas, and “pulsed” service radiating from timed-transfer centers in less populated suburban communities.

Though the project may seem to portend a period of confusion for riders, planners believe that it can be achieved with little patron dislocation.

REGIONAL CONNECTION — BART and AC Transit planners met Feb. 10 to develop a joint demonstration of coordinated bus-to-bus and bus-to-rail connections — the “timed transfer” concept incorporated in the Comprehensive Service Plan. Participants included (seated, from lower left) Howard Goode, Joe Pomar, Randy Franklin, Jim Evans, Alisa Jaramillo, and Dale Fousel from BART — AC Transit’s Kiyo Ushino (standing, left), Ron Kilcoyne and Don Larson (lower right).

District urges employees To add their input to CSP

An in-house communications campaign seeking input for the Comprehensive Service Plan features colorful art-work (above) and accompanying copy which stresses the need for experience-based employee reaction to the still-emerging plan for the District’s route re-structure.

The “ad” — appearing in the current issue of the District’s quarterly publication, On the Move, and in poster form on bulletin boards throughout the District — asks employees to study CSP proposals as described in four newly-published brochures; then to pass on their reactions and suggestions to Research and Planning.

The explanatory brochures outline proposed service plans for four areas: Richmond/Elsie Cerrito, Berkeley/Oakland, San Leandro/Hayward, and Fremont/Newark. “Ad” copy suggests that employees obtain the specific brochure “covering the area in which you are most knowledgeable.”

Concluding copy stresses the importance of employees’ “front-line experience and knowledge” in the service plan project.
FOCUS: Transit People and Projects

Saddlin’-up the Downtown Shuttle

MOBILITY OPTIONS — During inauguration of the carefree, fare-free downtown shuttle, officers of Oakland’s equestrian unit posed with some of the six specially-decorated buses now serving as a mid-day link between core commercial areas and Jack London Square. Bus refurbishment and service is being subsidized by a slate of downtown business boosters.

SERVING INDUSTRY — Cooperative efforts of private industry and AC Transit resulted in extension of Line 63 service to Harbor Bay Business Park in Alameda, where employees are being actively encouraged to use public transit. The weekday commute-hours service was inaugurated December 14.

Let’s “think insurance”

The Human Resources Department will be conducting its annual Health Insurance Open Enrollment in April, allowing employees and retirees to change their medical plans and/or add newly-acquired dependents.

During that April 1 - 30 period, employees also may elect to enroll in the Voluntary Term Life Insurance Plan, which provides coverage for themselves and any eligible dependants.

All such changes will take effect May 1, 1988. The Human Resources Department will provide additional information if contacted at (415) 891-4786 or 891-4788.

Checking equine speeds

ON TRACK — Golden Gate Fields Jockey Billy Fox offers a visual tip on the best bet for getting to the Albany racing oval, to which AC Transit is now offering special bus service for the 1988 season. Horse racing fans may board at the Transbay Terminal in San Francisco or Berkeley BART stations. Each racing day, service begins from these points about two hours before post-time. Return trips begin after the fifth race.

Regional rider read-out

SHARING INFORMATION — The busy transit hub at BART/Hayward features overhead television screens displaying up-to-date times on intersecting bus schedules for both AC Transit and SamTrans, as well as BART express bus service, operated by AC Transit. It’s one example of inter-agency cooperation to meet riders’ information needs.
Vehicle Audit Program lists interim results

After less than six months of existence, AC Transit's Vehicle Audit Program (VAP) has proved to be a valuable tool for improving delivery of service to the public, according to a late December report to the District's Board of Directors. VAP was initiated last August as a means of increasing efficiency and performance, while providing bus operators with a solid support system.

The program centers on "getting our people out into the field to help with the evaluation of day-to-day operations," says B. F. Williams, operations center manager, who is co-chair with Dorothy Parrish, human resources manager, of the interdepartmental VAP task force.

"We have surveyed all major lines and more than half the vehicles in our fleet," Williams says, "and we have been able to make recommendations for schedule and route changes which not only have helped drivers but have brought direct financial savings to the District."

Parrish shares the positive view. "We have a highly successful on-going program to identify problems and create innovative solutions," she says.

VAP's priorities for the current fiscal year are to:
- Increase on-time performance.
- Increase miles between road calls.
- Diminish the number of complaints — especially related to coach cleanliness.
- Reduce absenteeism.

In addition to the original 16 members of the VAP task force, other transportation supervisors and training instructors have been brought into the project to help evaluate lines, stops, and traffic points.

In one instance, a VAP finding resulted in the City of Hayward's cutting back some trees that were creating a hazard and obstruction at a bus stop. In another case, training programs were revised to reduce fixed-object accidents, when an evaluation showed the need for such. A third example of VAP work was elimination of a short extension of a line due to lack of ridership.

Other positive changes include improved bus cleanliness, as teams inspect coaches both on the road and in the yards; schedule adjustments to assist operators with more running time between points; and the provision of adequate end-of-line recovery time where it previously was insufficient.

The Board of Directors was informed at its December 22 meeting that the task force would continue to pursue goals of improved on-time performance, cleaner buses, better driver morale and fewer road-calls.

Our 'Stockholders' Write

I wanted you to know how very helpful one of your employees was to me.

Mr. Leroy Beach, a Dispatcher in your Hayward office, deserves recognition for his excellent sense of public service.

I lost my gold earring (expensive) on the bus and called AC Transit for help. I was heartsick over my loss. On a second call, I was referred to Beach. It was obvious that he really didn't have to take the extra time to help me, but he did!

Because of his willingness to help and his sense of responsibility and follow-through, my earring was found. I profusely thanked Mr. Beach, but somehow I wanted someone higher-up to know about this: how one AC Transit employee, through his helpfulness and concern, made one rider's day truly happy!

M. Blaha
Castro Valley

STANDARDS SYMBOL — AC Transit's Vehicle Audit Program lists interim results

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M. Blaha
Castro Valley

This letter is being sent to compliment your driver, Martha Reed, who presently has the BART Express Bus Route from Bayfair BART to the Lawrence Livermore Lab.

We, the regular passengers, find her a most conscientious, safe, pleasant, and, indeed, probably one of the nicest drivers we have ever had. A good job should not go unnoticed. She should be commended.

Signed by 14 passengers
Livermore

This driver (Vincent Brigantz) deserves a medal. He is the most genuinely friendly and helpful driver I have ever seen.

A. R. Marks
Berkeley

We came to Berkeley from Princeton, N.J., in August to stay for one semester. During that time I have been riding the AC Transit buses almost daily. It has been possible for me to get around efficiently without using a car. I wish we had this kind of bus service in central New Jersey!

In particular, I want to mention the excellent service and attitude of one driver, Harvey Thompson.

He gives information cheerfully, is always kind to the elderly and handicapped, and once handled a difficult passenger in a calming manner. The atmosphere on Mr. Thompson's bus is always good. I do believe that drivers like him encourage people to ride the bus!

Frances Benson
New Jersey

Angel Matthews
Berkeley

This is in regard to the courteous service given to your public riders by Alton Pines.

As a regular commuter, I have observed the polite service of many many of your operators. It's just that (Pines) is so consistent and is deserving recognition.

Signed by 14 passengers
Livermore

(Mickie) Jefferson is cheerful, courteous and helpful to all passengers and gets you there on time.

A real credit to the System.

John Wyatt
Piedmont
Actions of the Board

At a regular meeting December 9, the Board of Directors:

- Scheduled January 20 Public Hearing to solicit comment on initiating service to Golden Gate Fields as of January 26, on motion of Director Wiggins.
- Approved re-structure of Legal Department, on motion of Director Bettencourt.
- Authorized General Manager to negotiate contract with Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Quade and Douglas, Inc., for project management and technical assistance in connection with the Comprehensive Service Plan, on motion of Director Fajans.
- Authorized negotiation of contract with Booz-Allen & Hamilton, Inc., for specified management consultant services, on motion of Director Wiggins.

* * *

At an adjourned regular meeting December 22, the Board of Directors:

- Approved provision of a quantity of free bus tickets over a specified time period to aid in transporting needy persons to City of Oakland's emergency shelter, with stipulation that such transportation aid be available for similar city-sponsored programs in other East Bay communities, on motions of Directors Bettencourt and Wiggins.
- Awarded contract to Neil Peterson, ExecuTemps, for services as interim General Manager for a six-month period, on motion of Director Wiggins (see story, Pg. 3).
- Awarded contract to Booz-Allen & Hamilton, Inc., for a 90-day period of consultant services in connection with a management plan, on motion of Director Smith.
- Authorized General Manager to negotiate contract for a six-month extension of the New Resident Direct Mail Promotional Program, on motion of Director Bettencourt.
- Approved extension, on a month-to-month basis, of current legislative advocacy contract with Capitol Information Associates/Gerber and Associates, on motion of Director Smith.
- Elected Michael H. Fajans President and Peter Smith Vice-President for 1988, on motions of Director Bettencourt (see story, Pg. 2).