Today's transit leaders
View yesterday's modes
What the Press is Saying about Transit

A man transit should know

There is a man who will be setting up shop in the nation’s capitol soon whom Bay Area transit officials should get to know real well.

In fact, if BART, AC Transit, San Francisco Muni and other public transportation representatives are smart, they will soon be on a first-name basis with Samuel K. Skinner — the next United States transportation secretary.

That appointment, made by President-elect George Bush recently, would appear to be very good news for mass transportation systems throughout the nation.

Skinner, you see, is a professional mass transit booster. He has served as chairman of the Northeastern Illinois Regional Transportation Authority since 1984.

It has been eight long years for many transportation agencies nationwide under President Reagan’s administration. Federal transportation dollars have been very tight and the competition for what was allocated has been very stiff.

In a region like the Bay Area, wracked by numerous transportation problems, the situation has been frustrating. Northern California is a booming growth area, which needs to develop an efficient and lasting system for moving people, goods and services throughout the region.

Instead, the area finds itself with a regional transportation system that, overall, is ineffective. Congested highways and deteriorating roadways serve as testaments that the region is on a collision course with perpetual gridlock.

A key to altering that ominous course is producing public transit systems that can move people, lots of people, throughout the Bay Area in a smooth and timely fashion. The incentive must be strong enough to sway more motorists to seek alternative means of transportation on a regular basis.

Obviously, that means all public transit systems — BART, buses, ferries, etc. — must be expanded and coordinated before that scenario can ever be written. This is beginning to happen to some degree today, what with BART’s agreement with San Mateo County to expand service there and plans to extend rail service in Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

Such plans, however, remain an expensive, but necessary, proposition if the Bay Area is to remedy its many transportation ailments.

It’s also why our region’s public transportation officials should be clamoring to meet Secretary Skinner once he takes office. Bush has hired a true mass transit advocate to oversee the future of the nation’s transportation systems, and he is a man worth having in the Bay Area’s corner.

The future of Northern California could depend on it. (This is excerpted from an editorial in the January 4 issue)

THE COVER — A trio of top regional transit executives — GM’s (left to right) James O’Sullivan, AC Transit; William Steed, San Francisco MUNI; and Keith Bernard, BART — were interested participants January 14 as a significant transportation anniversary was celebrated at Solano County’s Western Railway Museum. The event being marked was the 50th anniversary of inauguration of electric train service on the lower deck of the Bay Bridge. The ceremonies included re-dedication of one of the museum’s 110-foot-long Bay Bridge trains that Key System, AC Transit’s predecessor, operated across the span until phase-out of the service in 1958. (See Page 5)

Budget details cost-saving moves

General Manager James L. O’Sullivan has recommended a revised budget which spells out long-range solutions to the financial problems which have plagued the District in recent years.

O’Sullivan’s January 25th budget message to the Board of Directors — “an accurate and sober account of the present financial condition of AC Transit,” he stated — set forth specific management actions geared to trim $3.4 million from the Fiscal Year 1988-89 operating budget.

Chief Financial Officer Les Porter, newly hired to oversee the Budget Department which generated the status report and forecast, spelled out in detail the difference between original budget assumptions and current projections for the year.

The $121.2 million spending plan contains a series of corrective cost-cutting actions which, with other management initiatives and improvements in some projected revenues, leaves a shortfall of $2.4 million — but avoids cuts in expenditures for on-street operations. Also, it diverts maintenance allocations that had been intended for coach appearance enhancement to the function of improving mechanical reliability.

“The budget could be balanced this year only through severe actions which would have very deleterious long-term effects on our finances, services, patrons and employees,” Porter told Directors. Instead, he recommended, the District should increase expenditures for on-street operations while reducing administrative and executive support in real dollars.

The message also identified long-term gains stemming from establishment of the new Budget Department and of a new long-range financial planning process which involves all of management. This initial forecast covers a five-year period, with preliminary results promising a cumulative surplus in the third year.

“There are no quick fixes to the budget deficits which have plagued AC Transit,” O’Sullivan noted. “The problems developed over time, and it will take time to solve them. This revised budget and, more importantly, the strategic budget process which generated this report, are vital initial steps in that direction.”

AC Transit’s General Manager since last September, O’Sullivan said that the District will continue following the aggressive strategic approach established by the newly-hired top management team to achieve balanced future budgets and improved operations.

“This District can no longer lurk from financial crisis to crisis without a direction for the long term,” he told Directors. “The most important challenge we face is not necessarily to balance this year’s budget — but rather to guarantee a stable financial plan for the future.”

The Directors unanimously approved the actions trimming $3.4 million from this year’s budget and took the longer-range facets of the financial program under consideration.

Media promotes transit

February 28

KPIX 5

KPIX-TV and KCBS Radio have joined the campaign to increase use of alternative transportation modes.

Beginning February 1, the two stations launched promotional and informational events geared to selling carpools and mass transit as mobility options, culminating February 28 in a “Beat the Back-Up” Day, during which people were urged to use any efficient alternative to cars.

Winners of a tie-in contest were to be announced that night on KPIX’S “Evening Magazine.”
Annual job excellence award shared

This year for the first time, outstanding workers in all four of the District’s major work groups are sharing honors as “1988 Employees of the Year.”

Verlin L. Hart, dispatcher, Hayward Division, was named “Clerical Employee of the Year” for being, in the words of his nomination, “Always willing to go the extra mile for the good of the District.” The veteran dispatcher, whose tenure in the position dates from 1961, is closing out his transit career on this high note, with retirement set for the end of January.

Carrie J. Powell, office administrator, Marketing, shares the honors as a result of her selection as “Non-Union Employee of the Year.” The nomination sums up her qualities of excellence on-the-job by stating that, “Although she constantly works under great pressure, due to the nature of the Marketing/Public Affairs function, she is always helpful, friendly, and a delightful person to deal with.”

Alfred Raphael, Hayward Division, assumes the title “Mechanic of the Year” on the basis of an excellent attendance record and for being “always willing to accept responsibility beyond his prescribed duties.” Raphael has been in his Mechanic “C” classification since 1986.

Lawrence Young, who has worked behind-the-wheel of District vehicles since 1960, is being honored as “Bus Driver of the Year.” In the words of Young’s nomination, “He works very unselfishly, never seems to tire and thinks constantly of the ‘good of the service.’”

Winners receive engraved plaques, two-night holiday packages for two, and work-site celebrations.

Prior annual winners have been Mechanic Herman Lawrence, 1985; Driver James C. Taylor, 1986; and Mechanic James O. Huppert, 1987.

Board alters meeting hour To encourage attendance

AC Transit’s publicly-elected Directors have established a new schedule of early-evening Board Meetings beginning in February to make it even easier for regular commuters to help plan the future of East Bay bus service.

At regular meetings twice each month, the Directors establish the policies that govern bus service throughout the greater metropolitan East Bay. In addition to deciding on such matters as service adjustments and improvements, the Board also monitors and reviews the many operational and support functions required to keep the 830-bus fleet in service to the public.

To give riders an even greater opportunity to participate in the process, regular Board meetings are being scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. (rather than 4 p.m.) on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month. Thus, the February meetings were held during the evenings of the 8th and the 22nd.

Agendas for AC Transit Board Meetings are posted publicly at least 72 hours prior to each session and are on display, day and night, in the Lobby at System headquarters, 1600 Franklin Street, Oakland. In addition, the Board Agendas are mailed regularly to newspapers and for posting in public libraries throughout the East Bay.

Board meetings normally are held at the System’s administrative offices, second floor, 1600 Franklin Street in downtown Oakland — just a short walk from the many mainline bus routes making transfer connections at 14th and Broadway, and midway between BART 12th St./City Center and BART 19th St. stations.

Transit Time - Capsule

Bay Bridge trains rolled 50 years ago

January 14 marked the half-century anniversary of inauguration of commuter-train service on the lower deck of the Bay Bridge, which had opened to automobile traffic on November 12, 1936, just two years prior to completion of the railway.

These bridge trains, which included the streamlined, center-hinged electric cars operated by Key System, AC Transit’s predecessor, gradually replaced the fondly remembered ferryboat fleet that had long served transbay travelers.

In Oakland, Key System tracks ran along 12th Street, East 14th, Grand, Lake Shore, 40th, Piedmont, 55th, Claremont, and Adeline. Berkeley, Piedmont, and Emeryville residents also had access to the transbay trains, where comfortable leather seats eased the quick commute. It was a mere 33-minute run from Oakland’s Claremont Hotel to the same San Francisco terminal (First and Mission) from which AC Transit buses operate today.

Key System train service survived until 1958, replaced by a fleet of transbay buses. But both the memories and some of the mementoes of bridge train service have been preserved at the non-profit Western Railway Museum near Fairfield, among whose collection of 100 vintage rail cars are three Key System transbay coaches.

The volunteer-operated museum, where visitors can actually board and ride many of the restored rail veterans, sponsored mid-January ceremonies and celebrations of the half-century anniversary. But, year-round, the museum is always an exciting week-end destination, where the long-gone era of Bridge trains and urban streetcars can be vividly recalled.

It is located on Highway 12, near Fairfield. Many of the restored cars operate over a 1.5-mile electrified track during the week-ends-only hours of 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
EYE-CATCHER — A current bus poster so impressed one member of the public — Robert Woods of Piedmont — that he contributed this photo, noting that “This baseball superstar is definitely a role model for many of our aspiring youngsters.” Oakland’s Office of Economic Development and Employment is spear-heading the promotional effort behind the poster, whose message is being carried on buses in service throughout the East Bay.

RACING REMINDER — Local and trans-bay bus service to Golden Gate Fields, Albany, is noted by track announcer Larry Collins. The season runs through June 25, with coaches rolling from BART/ North Berkeley or San Francisco’s Transbay Terminal.

FOCUS: Transit People and Projects

Our ‘Stockholders’ Write

I have a disability and must use a crutch. The driver I would like to compliment (Brenda Pernell) always brings the bus close to the curb, making it easier for me to step up on the bus. She always waits until I am seated before she takes off. If I need answers to questions about destinations, she gives me the answers politely and not like it’s a “chore”!

Most times I am in a lot of pain, but whenever I see Brenda, even when I am not riding with her, she’ll see me and wave. I can’t tell you how good it makes me feel.

Jeannine Buford Richmond

As a daily rider of AC Transit, I have had the privilege of having Driver Mary Anne O’Rorke as the driver (on various Lines).

I must commend Mary Anne on being the model of professionalism under the most extreme circumstances. She is always on time! She is courteous, friendly, and extremely helpful to the elderly and handicapped.

In the most stress-related profession in the country, she is an asset to your organization.

Paulette Washington Oakland

This driver (Boubacar Djallah) had a very sick passenger on the bus and was very good about stopping the bus to allow the passenger to recover.

Chico Salvador Antioch

This letter is being written to compliment two of your drivers (Virginia Benson and Francisco Pangelinan) — both excellent, courteous, helpful and nice.

I know, having commuted to Livermore for the past several years, that the commute hours are hectic, traffic unbelievable, etc. Yet these two drivers managed to handle their jobs in a highly professional manner.

Irene A. Speranza
San Leandro

Star performers are those players who perform consistently well over the long-haul. I must say that Driver Samuel Toney, Jr., is a star performer.

He was consistently courteous to all passengers, drove in an alert and safe manner, and was prompt every day.

Rita Y. Myers
East Bay

(Ed. Note: Passenger Myers also had equal words of praise, in a separate letter, for another operator: Nathaniel Robinson.)

So often we find the time to complain, but seldom do we take the time to compliment. I want to praise one of your drivers (James R. Edber). I ride with this driver five days a week, mornings and afternoons. I know I can depend on him to arrive on time, which helps make my day less stressful. I hope you let the driver know how much he is appreciated for being so polite, helpful and courteous.

Mary K. Johnson
Richmond
Actions of the Board

At a regular meeting November 9, the Board of Directors:
• Approved a $40 Express Bus Monthly Pass.

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At a regular meeting November 23, the Board of Directors:
• Approved completion in-house, of two bus refurbishment projects: re-painting of 200 coaches and re-upholstering of seats in 30 coaches.
• Approved dispatch of letter to APTA Chairman urging acceptance of resolution proposed by APTA Task Force on Elderly and Handicapped Persons.
• Authorized General Manager to enter into contracts for security services with specified regional law enforcement agencies.

At an adjourned regular meeting November 30, the Board of Directors:
• Certified results of November 8 election and passed resolution relating to said election and the resultant re-configuration of Directorships.

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At a regular meeting December 14, the Board of Directors:
• Approved special service to Golden Gate Fields (see Pg. 6).
• Approved application to CalTrans for funds in connection with I-80 reconstruction.
• Affirmed policy of working cooperatively with other operators toward functional consolidation.
• Deferred action on revision of current Board Procedures.
• Convened Public Hearing to receive comment on Five-Year Plan, 1989-93.

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At an adjourned regular meeting December 28, the Board of Directors:
• Authorized travel in connection with APTA Legal Affairs Annual Meeting and Transportation Research Board event.
• Approved review of By-Laws of Accessibility Advisory Committee.
• Scheduled Work Session relating to “Performance Indicators.”
• Scheduled committee discussion of “Suburban Mobility Initiatives.”
• Convened Public Hearing to receive input on Five-Year Plan, 1989-93.
• Approved three-year contract for services relating to Workers’ Compensation; approved retention, in-house, of responsibility for Liability Claims administration.
• Approved contracting jointly with other regional agencies for Federal Lobbying Services.
• Approved re-scheduling of Board meetings for 7 p.m. for a three-month period, effective February 1 (see story, Pg. 4).
• Approved dispatch of letter relating to Auditor General’s report.

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At a regular meeting January 11, the Board of Directors:
• Approved travel in connection with APTA Training Committee event and APTA Legislative Conference.
• Elected 1989 Board President and Vice-President.
• Approved dispatch of letter relating to Auditor General’s report.