

DESTINATIONS

Destinations is the official newsletter of the Regional Public Transportation Authority

Vol II Issue I, Winter 1999

Mass Transit A Necessity for Valley's Future

Opinion

Lela Steffy



Representative Lela Steffy, a Republican, is from District 29 (Mesa). Committees that she has participated on include: Transportation; Government Operations; Human Services; and Judiciary. She moved to Arizona in 1973 from San Diego; retired since 1995; she and husband Warren have eight children and 23 grandchildren.

State Representative Lela Steffy (R-Mesa) believes that the only way to keep the Valley and state of Arizona moving forward is to find sources of funding that will support mass transit. Due to the efforts of Steffy and Arizona Transit Association (AzTA) Executive Director Jim Shipman, House Bill (HB) 2565 was passed earlier this year allowing \$8 million in new transit funding statewide. The bill, which provides federal transportation act revenues for use to trigger state vehicle license tax (VLT) monies for transit, is the first of its kind to offer a dedicated funding source for transit in Arizona.

This bill entered us (Arizona) into the mass transit world, says Steffy, although it still isn't enough. As an example, the State of Arizona has been spending about \$3 per person on transportation, whereas California spends \$43 and Washington spends \$29 per person.

Until now, transit has relied heavily on city budgets and limited lottery revenues. Although, Steffy admits, local cities do need to participate in funding transit for their areas and take responsibility for their residents' mobility. As an example, Tempe has embraced mobility and mass transit with its voter-approved half-cent sales tax to support transit in their city. Mesa was recently successful with a voter-approved referendum that allocated a portion of a three-eighths cent sales tax to transit.

If the cities don't want mass transit, we can't force it. But, they will eventually need it, Steffy predicts. With the population of Maricopa County expected to swell to more than double its current size in the next 25 years, a funding plan to address future growth and alternative mode options is needed now. Another positive aspect of HB2565 is that it allows ADOT (Arizona Department of Transportation) to participate in mass transit, which has not happened before now.

We are excited that Mary Peters, the director of ADOT, is supportive of multi-modal options, says Steffy. Although ADOT has not been supportive of alternate modes in the past, Ms. Peters recognizes the need for other ways to move people than by adding more cars to our freeways.

We cannot build freeways wide enough, or build enough of them to accommodate for the future population in this area, says Steffy. We must find another way to move people.

After serving four years as the Chairman of the House Transportation Committee, Steffy is quite familiar with how the efficient movement of goods and people are essential to a strong, vital economy and a better quality of life.

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Improvements Due To New Funding

HB2565 is the first bill of its kind to offer a dedicated funding source from the state government for transit in Arizona.

See page 3 for improvements to bus service due to HB2565. All improvements are reflected in the new Bus Book with service beginning March 21st.



Take the Bus or Vanpool and Save Money

Tax-free and pre-tax benefits keep more money in employers' and employees' pockets

Thanks to the passage of TEA-21 (Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century) both employers and employees are able to make substantial savings when workers utilize transit or vanpool for their regular commutes.

Prior to TEA-21, employers could provide transit or vanpool benefits in addition to (not in lieu of) compensation. Under TEA-21, and the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, the options are now greater and provide even bigger savings for both parties. The transit and vanpool qualified fringe benefits can now be utilized as follows:

Transit/Vanpool Tax-free Benefit:

Employers can give employees up to \$65 per month in benefits to commute by transit or vanpools. The employer pays for the benefit and receives an equivalent deduction from business income taxes. Employees receive the benefit free of all payroll and income taxes.



Transit/Vanpool Pre-tax Benefit:

Employers can have employees set aside some of their pre-tax income to pay for transit or vanpools. Up to \$65 per month is considered a pre-tax benefit. Therefore, employees save on payroll and income

taxes, and employers save on payroll costs as well.

Combination Benefit:

Employers can share the cost of commuting by giving the employee part of the commuting expense tax-free and allowing employees to set aside the remaining amount (pre-tax) up to the total limit of \$65 per month.

Parking Cash Out:

This option is meant to provide an additional financial incentive for employees to use alternate mode options. An employer may offer to give employees cash for their parking space and the option to

take payment as: taxable cash, or a tax-free fringe benefit for transit or vanpools, or a combination of cash and a fringe.

Look for additional information on the Valley Metro website: www.valleymetro.maricopa.gov. Or contact 262-7433 for more details on the tax law and how to provide alternative transportation benefits to employees. □

Destinations is available on audio tape and in braille. If you know of anyone who might be interested in receiving *Destinations* in either format, please call RPTA's Lillian Duarte at 534-1937. *Destinations* is the official newsletter of the Regional Public Transportation Authority (RPTA). It is published with a circulation of approximately 6,000 copies. We welcome your letters, comments and suggestions.

The RPTA is a political subdivision of Arizona overseen by a ten-member board of elected officials, and was created by voters in 1985 with the passage of Proposition 300. Membership is open to all municipalities in Maricopa County and to the county government.

The mission of RPTA is to promote the social and economic well-being of the community through an efficient and effective regional transit system as a valued and significant component of the transportation network.

To receive future copies of *Destinations* please write or call:

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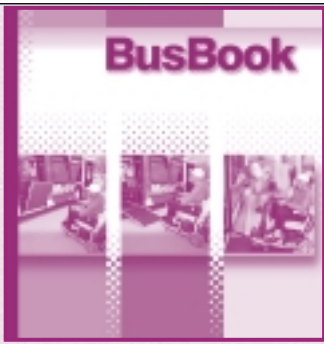
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**New Bus Book
effective March 21st**

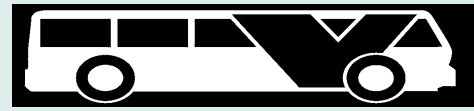
Service Improvements Funded from HB2565

Thanks to the transit funding bill, HB2565, approved by legislators last fall, much needed bus service on 29 Valley Metro routes is being enhanced as part of the March 21st service change. For a complete list of changes, see the upcoming Bus Book or call Customer Service at 253-5000.

Improvements effective March 21st:

- ! **Red Line:** Saturday service in Phoenix
- ! **Blue Line:** Saturday service; selected weekday trips extended north to Union Hills Drive and new Mayo Hospital, Phoenix
- ! **Route 27:** Saturday service
- ! **Route 60:** Weekday service extended to 67th Avenue; Saturday service to 43rd Avenue
- ! **Route 67:** Saturday service
- ! **Route 80:** Saturday service
- ! **Route 90:** Saturday service
- ! **Route 170:** Saturday Service ☐

**This new symbol shows there
is bus service to a job location.**



Working Together To Get People To Work

Valley Metro, the City of Phoenix and the Arizona Republic are making it easier for job seekers to get to potential work locations. The bus logo will be placed on classified ads in the employment section that have a Valley Metro bus stop located less than ¼ mile away. The bus logo will help both employers and employees by attracting candidates throughout the Valley and by offering reliable public transportation. Riding the bus to work, instead of driving each day, also helps with relieving traffic congestion and pollution.

Employers are charged only an additional \$5 for the bus symbol. For more information about adding the symbol to your employment ads, call The Arizona Republic, Classified Employment Section at 444-2424. ☐

Transit Programs and Improvements

Proposed Legislation To Assist Employers With TRP

Winding its way through committees, House Bill 2151, if passed, would make \$2 million available over a three-year period to establish a grant program for employers statewide. Representatives Roberta Voss, (R-Glendale) and Carolyn Allen, (R-Scottsdale) are co-sponsors of the bill and are working to convince other legislators that the impact of such legislation can be positive for Arizonans.

“We see this as both an air quality initiative and an incentive for economic development, even in rural areas of the state,” said Voss.

Employers, both public and private, could apply for the grant to help defray 50% of the actual costs incurred or \$25,000, whichever is less, for subsidizing employees’ public transit fares, vanpool expenses, and telecommuting equipment purchased by the employer. The priority to award the funding will be to employers who are able to establish higher air quality benefits and reduce vehicle trips, especially with starting up or expanding trip reduction programs.

Stakeholders in support of the bill include:

- ! APS
- ! Arizona Association of Industries
- ! Valley Forward
- ! American Lung Association of Arizona
- ! Arizona Transit Association
- ! City of Tucson
- ! Pima Association of Governments
- ! Regional Public Transportation Authority
- ! Southwest Gas
- ! US West

For more information about the bill, call RPTA at 262-7433, or look at ALIS (Arizona Legislature Information System) Online at: www.azleg.state.az.us ☐

Free Field Trip Rides Available

On Thursday, November 12, the RPTA Board of Directors adopted a measure to provide free bus fares for preschool, kindergarten and elementary school groups of up to 35 children. All trips are subject to space availability on Valley Metro fixed route bus service from approximately 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Requests for free field trip passes must be made five working days prior to the date of the field trip. An itinerary and trip timetable will be developed for each school group and mailed to the school group along with the newly designed “Free Group Field Trip All Day Pass.” The pass is valid only on the day of the trip. For information about the school outreach program, call 253-5000, option 5. ☐



Governor Hull Endorses Plan to Reduce Valley's Ozone

If we can avoid having any ozone violations this summer, we will accomplish a lot. It will be the third summer in a row without having an ozone violation. By doing so, we are not only improving air quality, but we are able to help companies doing business here by removing potential federal sanctions that adversely impact our economy.

To accomplish this goal of having no violations of the ozone one-hour standard RPTA, APS, Valley Forward, the Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce, and other Valley organizations have joined together to develop a plan to help reduce vehicle trips. Cars and trucks are a major contributor to the recipe that combines tailpipe emissions with sunlight to develop ozone.

The idea is to reduce the number of employee vehicles that travel to a company's facilities by at least 10 percent (by teleworking or ridesharing) on designated

High Pollution Alert Days. By committing to be a part of the program, companies will not have to add any other strategies to their trip reduction plans for the upcoming year.

A letter from Arizona Governor Jane Hull was sent to CEOs and Transportation Coordinators of more than 1,200 companies in early February. We are asking for their support and commitment to be a part of the plan. Upcoming activities will include an informational workshop on March 18 and a practice day on Telework Greater Phoenix Day, April 20. This effort is also part of the Telework 2001 program to expand and implement telecommuting programs at Valley organizations.

For details about the Governor's initiative to drive away ozone this summer, or to receive a commitment form, please call RPTA at 262-7433. □



Tempe Residents Featured on Newest FLASH Buses

The FLASH Lite Weekday, a free circulator shuttle route connecting the city's downtown, Arizona State University, and Papago Park Center employment area, began Feb. 1.

The Free Local Area Shuttle route utilizes three state-of-the-art hybrid electric buses specially designed for our high-temperature desert environment.

The buses feature exterior designs by a local artist, Phyllis Lane, through a joint project between the city's Transportation and Municipal Arts Commissions. Lane created three different designs for the buses, using over 40 photographs

of Tempe residents and employees.

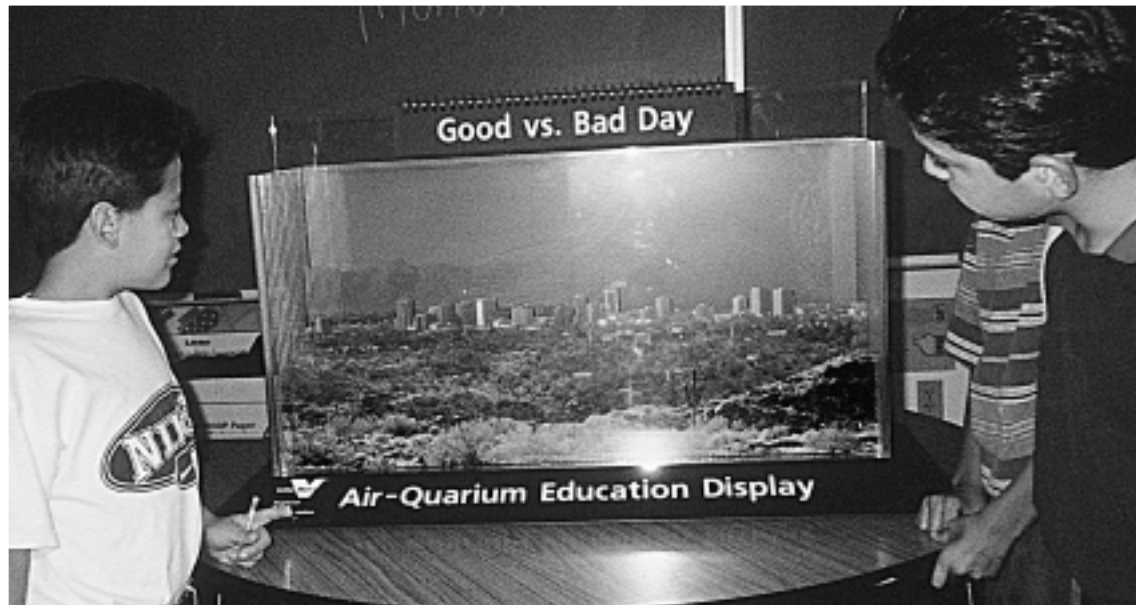
Local employers and residents in Tempe have been a big help in planning and scheduling bus service improvements. Papago Park Center employers surveyed their employees regarding the new FLASH Electric route. Other bus service improvements implemented in Tempe last August have been a big hit with residents.

Tempe will be adding service in March on Guadalupe, Elliot and Warner Roads, and Hardy Drive. For more information, call Tempe in Motion (the City of Tempe's transit office) at 350-2739. □

Fun on the bus...these Tempe residents are depicted on the city's newest Flash buses.



Clean Air Campaign's Air-Quarium



The goal of the Air-Quarium display is to help adults and children understand what causes air pollution, and how it affects visibility, the environment, and our health.

Education

Valley's Brown Cloud Goes On Display

You won't find any tropical fish gliding by, but the Clean Air Campaign's newest weapon in the battle against air pollution does resemble a large fish aquarium. Dubbed the Air-Quarium, the Plexiglas tank is an interactive, educational display that realistically demonstrates the Valley's air pollution problem.

With the Phoenix skyline and mountains in the background, multiple panels slide into the Air-Quarium to show the brown cloud buildup from a good visibility day with the mountains clearly visible, to a bad day with the mountains disappearing in the haze. The Air-Quarium was designed from slides and data provided by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality visibility study.

The goal of the display is to help adults and children understand what causes air pollution, and how it affects the environment and our health. High pollution days pose a serious health risk for children, the elderly and those suffering from lung disorders.

About 70 percent of the brown cloud in the Valley comes from vehicle exhaust and winter is one of the worst times for air pollution due to the nighttime temperature inversion that traps carbon monoxide and particulates at ground level. To help reduce air pollution, Valley residents are encouraged to carpool, vanpool, ride the bus, walk, bike, telecommute, or combine trips. □

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Mass Transit—A Necessity for Valley's Future

In the 1940s most cities in the U.S. had some type of a rail system, and by 1949, the rail was either taken up or paved over, Steffey said. Now most cities have it (rail) back again.

In fact, nearly all of Phoenix's peer cities, such as Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego, San Jose, San Francisco, St. Louis, Denver, Portland, and Dallas have a rail system in place or are planning one.

We must have buses, but rail is needed because buses use lanes of traffic. A mix (of rail and bus) is needed.

Steffey fully understands the value of travel by train. In fact, she just returned home from a cross-country rail excursion that took her, and husband Warren, from Tucson to Charleston, S.C. This isn't my first

trip across country taking the train, but it was the most extensive, and we loved it. You really get to enjoy all the scenery, instead of peering down at it from an airplane.

Traveling is something Steffey hopes to do more of now that she is retired from the legislature. After a total of 14 years as a representative for the Mesa district and 16 years prior to that holding a career in both banking and real estate, she is ready for a slower pace.

Steffey plans to stay involved with transportation in the Valley by being part of the Governor's transportation task force. No doubt, when it comes to support for transit in this region and the State of Arizona, Steffey will be the first to climb on board. □

Central Phoenix/East Valley Light Rail Study On Track



Enhanced photo showing how light rail transit in downtown Phoenix would appear.

Faced with obvious transportation problems, Valley residents and community leaders continue to search for potential solutions. Studies throughout the Valley indicate that improved transit is critical to maintain and enhance our quality of life and economic competitiveness. One of these studies, the Central Phoenix/East Valley Major Investment Study (MIS), was completed in May 1998. The purpose of the MIS was to identify and evaluate technology and alignment options for transportation improvements in the Valley. In other words, *what* should go *where* to help solve our transportation problems.

The results of this study, based on public input and technical analysis, include the following recommendations:

- 6 Implement a regional light rail transit (LRT) system linking downtown Phoenix, Tempe, and Mesa.
- 6 Initiate the system with a 13-mile segment in a corridor linking downtown Phoenix and Tempe.
- 6 Expand local and express bus service within the corridor.

What happens next? With the results of the MIS serving as a base, the study now moves to the next phase of study. The next phase, Advanced Planning, will provide a more detailed analysis of:

- 6 The LRT route;
- 6 Environmental issues;
- 6 LRT station locations and design standards;
- 6 LRT operating plans and
- 6 Cost estimates and ridership.

This current phase is expected to take approximately 18 to 24 months. It will include extensive input from the general public; project stakeholders (e.g., adjacent neighborhoods, business owners, etc.); and local, state and federal agencies. At the end of this study, citizens and local and federal officials will have specific information to use in making a decision whether the project should proceed.

This phase of the project is also the time during which local funding sources need to be identified and agreed upon. Assuming local funding is approved, the project would then enter final design and ultimately, construction. The entire process—from advanced planning, final design, and construction to actual operation would take approximately five years.

Community involvement is important. There are many opportunities to participate in the planning process. RPTA will be meeting with neighborhood groups, business owners, and government agencies to explain the project and receive feedback on any issues or concerns.

How can you get involved? Contact RPTA for more information or to be added to our mailing list through the Valley Connections hotline (534-1807). Write us at: rail@vm.maricopa.gov. You can also obtain information from our web site: www.valleymetro.maricopa.gov.

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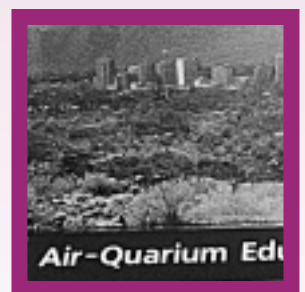
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